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ABSTRACT

Studying students' questions during literature discussions became the focus of a qualitative exploratory research project that a university teacher and second-grade teacher pursued over the course of one school year. Their research began as a study of the process of transferring responsibility from teacher to students in a literature discussion format designed to promote critical thinking. The research evolved into a study of what teacher-researchers and second graders learned when students' questions were the nucleus of literature discussions. Data collection involved three phases of study designed to represent points on a continuum from teacher-facilitated to student-only discussion.Results indicated that: (1) when responsibility for posing discussion questions was transferred to students, the discussion format being used became incompatible with the kind of questions students were interested in discussing; (2) students were eager to pose questions that addressed what they needed and wanted to understand about literature and life; (3) they generated numerous and varied written questions; and (4) they listened carefully to each other and willingly participated in discussing all the questions presented. The teacher-researchers learned more about their own tendency to impose teacher ideas about what constitutes a "good" discussion question on students' question-asking. Findings suggest that the study was more about the process the teacher-researchers underwent to accept that students provide the "right" kind of discussion questions when they have opportunities to ask about anything they find interesting, curious, or confusing. (Contains 86 references, 7 tables, and 3 figures of data.) (RS)

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Questions Children Want to Discuss About Literature: What Teachers and Students Learned in a Second-Grade Classroom

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READING RESEARCH REPORT NO. 47
Fall 1995

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The National Reading Research Center (NRRC) is funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education to conduct research on reading and reading instruction. The NRRC is operated by a consortium of the University of Georgia and the University of Maryland College Park in collaboration with researchers at several institutions nationwide.

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Michelle Commeyras is an Assistant Professor of Reading Education at the University of Georgia. She has a B.A. in History and an M.A. in Critical and Creative Thinking from the University of Massachusetts/Boston. She received a Ph.D. in Education from the University of Illinois/ Champaign-Urbana in 1991. Her experiences as an educator have been in elementary, junior high, senior high, and college classrooms. She has long been interested in exploring pedagogical approaches that promote critical thinking in classroom discussions of texts.

Georgiana Sumner has been a classroom teacher for sixteen years. She has taught grades K-3, and presently teaches second grade at Alps Road Elementary. She received an M.Ed. from the University of Georgia. Georgiana has always been interested in creating an environment for risk-free student-centered participation and creative thinking. Motivating and supporting children at all ability levels has been expecially challenging. Focusing on student literacy partnerships across grade levels has been of special interest in meeting this challenge.

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Reading Research Report No. 47
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Abstract. *Studying students' questions during literature discussions became the focus of a qualitative exploratory research project that a university teacher and second-grade teacher pursued over the course of one school year. Their research began as a study of the process of transferring responsibility from teacher to students in a literature discussion format designed to promote critical thinking. As is permissible within qualitative methodologies, the research evolved into a study of what the teacher-researchers and second graders learned when students' questions were the nucleus of literature discussions. Data collection involved three phases of study designed to represent points on a continuum from teacher-facilitated to student-only discussions. When responsibility for posing discussion questions was transferred to students, it became apparent that the discussion format being used was incompatible with the kind of questions students were interested in discussing. The interpretive analyses of student-generated questions, discussion transcripts, student interviews, and researcher conversations are organized according to two themes: what the teacher-researchers learned about student-posed discussion questions and what the students learned. It was evident that students were eager to pose questions that addressed what they needed and wanted to understand about literature and life. When given the opportunity to write, they generated numerous and varied questions. They listened carefully to each other and willingly participated in discussing all the questions presented. Students exhibited a desire to communicate that which perplexed and interested them by attending to the wording of questions. This led them to listen carefully to each other and offer suggestions for more exact statements of questions. The teacher-researchers learned about their own tendency to impose teacher ideas about what constitutes a "good" discussion question on students' question-asking. They concluded that the study was more about the process they had to undergo to accept that students provide the "right" kind of discussion questions when they have opportunities to ask about anything they find interesting, curious, or confusing.*

> "Most of the knowledge that matters to us—the knowledge that constitutes our conception of the world, of other people and of ourselves—is not developed in a passive way. We come to know through processes of active interpretation and integration. We ask questions. . . ." (Donaldson, 1992, p. 19)

The asking of questions is and has been a mainstay of teaching in western cultures since the time of Plato and Socrates (355 B.C.). Socrates, the Grecian sage and teacher, engaged pupils in question and answer dialogues designed to lead them to accepting "correct" and "rational" conclusions. The pedagogical superiority of questioning has been addressed in modern times by the philosopher John Dewey, who wrote that "a question will force the mind to go wherever it is capable of going, better than will the most ingenious pedagogical devices" (Boydston, 1981, p. 333). Indeed, the pedagogy of questioning is widely practiced. Observational studies of classrooms in the United States have repeatedly found that teachers ask hundreds of questions of their students each and every day (Dillon, 1988; Gall, 1970). Sometimes their questioning may be Socratic, but more likely questions are used for other purposes, such as stimulating participation, reviewing previously studied material, initiating discussion, diagnosing student abilities, assessing student progress, controlling behavior, recalling factual information, and promoting higher-order thinking (Wilen, 1991).

Implicit in the use of questioning to teach is the assumption that questions generate thinking. Hilda Taba (1966), a pioneer in developing "thinking skills" curricula, described questioning as the most influential aspect of teaching because of the potential of questions to influence student thinking and learning. Teachers are advised to ask questions that will cause students to think analytically, evaluatively, creatively, abstractly, theoretically, and so forth (Morgan & Saxton, 1991). They are also advised to encourage students to generate questions that seek reasons, explore alternatives, examine assumptions, and reflect on their own reasoning processes (Browne & Keeley, 1990; Walsh & Paul, 1989).

However, research on questions students ask is sparse compared to that which has been done on the questions teachers ask (Carlsen, 1991; Gall, 1970). The research that has been done on student questioning has been either observational and descriptive (Dillon, 1988; Good, Slavings, Harel, & Emerson, 1987) or focused on teaching or training students to ask certain kinds of questions (Davey & McBride, 1986; King, 1994; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Singer & Donlan, 1982). Opportunities to research students' questions are becoming more evident with the increasing popularity of response-centered discussions of literature. Descriptions of such discussions often make reference to the role questioning plays when students respond freely to their reading experiences. For example, Eeds and Wells (1989) reported that during "Grand Conversations" about literature, "students were actively questioning what they were reading" (p. 20). Raphael and McMahon (1994) found that when students participated in "Book Clubs," "they learned to generate a range of questions to elicit discussion from their peers"

(p. 108). Noll's (1994) account of Literature Circles in a seventh-grade class made reference to the influence of a student's question: "Tanya's question, generated by the literature she read, was a concern to all members and became the focus of their discussions" (p. 91). These references to questioning indicate that it is a natural and important response to literature.

However, questioning does not appear as a response category in Beach and Hynd's (1991) review of research on response to literature. Furthermore, they found few studies on the role of questioning in understanding literature. Questioning as a response to literature has yet to be the primary focus of studies of literature discussions. Although Newkirk and McLure (1992) have provided an account of first and second graders' use of formula questions in book discussion groups, they submit that it may be adult-centric to expect 6- and 7-year-olds to ask questions to resolve perplexities, seek information, and explore motives as do adult readers.

Studying students' questions during literature discussions became the focus of the qualitative exploratory research project pursued over the course of a school year with second-grade students. The research began as a study of the process of transferring responsibility from teacher to students in a literature discussion format designed to promote critical thinking. As is permissible within qualitative methodologies, the research evolved into a study of what the teacher-researchers and second graders learned when students' questions became the nucleus of our literature discussions. The choice to use qualitative methodology meant that our study would not be restricted by preconceived procedures; it would involve constructing a picture that would take shape as we collected and examined data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). How the emphasis on questioning developed and what it contributes to our collective understanding about discussion, reading, and learning is the theme of this research.

Research Goals

Michelle, who teaches at a university in the southeastern United States, and Georgiana, who teaches at a nearby elementary school, met in the spring of 1992. Michelle had mailed a letter to area principals of elementary schools introducing herself and offering to meet with anyone interested in promoting critical thinking in conjunction with reading instruction. In the letter, she offered to demonstrate an approach to conducting literature discussions called dialogical-thinking reading lessons (Commeyras, 1991, 1993). Essentially, a dialogical-thinking reading discussion would involve students discussing a central story-related question by identifying and evaluating reasons to support two different and plausible opinions in response to the question. The goal of each lesson was to engage students in "reasonable reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do" (Ennis, 1987, p. 10).

In the philosophical literature on critical thinking, dialogical thinking refers to fostering serious consideration of alternative or competing perspectives on significant issues. In a dialogical approach to teaching, students "learn to argue for and against each and every important point of view and each basic belief or

conclusion that they are to take seriously" (Paul, 1987, p. 140). Dialogical thinking relies on the discussion method of teaching (Bridges, 1979). Through discussion, students are encouraged to put forth more than one point of view, examine and respond to different points of view, develop understanding, and eventually arrive at carefully considered judgments. Promoting critical thinking through dialogical thinking and discussion are further supported by Vygotskian perspectives (Rogoff, 1990; Wertsch, 1985) that maintain that social interaction is essential to language, thought, and learning. Theories of social cognition support teach critical thinking by involving students in discussions where it is called for and naturally occurs. Based on this theory, critical-thinking abilities and dispositions should be internalized by individual students over the course of multiple opportunities to participate in literature discussions designed to elicit and support critical thinking.

After two dialogical thinking discussions were conducted with Georgiana's class, it was decided to undertake a research project the following school year to explore what process would enable the transfer of responsibility from teacher to students for elements of such discussions. Interest in this focus of study was inspired by findings from prior research where there appeared to be a relationship between students who had more responsibility and their engagement in critical thinking (Commeyras, 1991). Furthermore, it has been recommended that responsibility for tasks in reading instruction should be released gradually to students (Pearson & Dole, 1987). For example, in reciprocal teaching, the role of "teacher" in text-based recitations is gradually transferred to students (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). Interest in handing over responsibility to students was also inspired by accounts of how peer discussions about literature promoted student autonomy (O'Flahavan, 1989). The concept of autonomy seemed particularly relevant given an interest in fostering the kind of critical thinking that contributes to the construction of knowledge and the critiquing of knowledge presented as true and factual (Neilsen, 1989).

We viewed this study as an opportunity to contribute to classroom research on critical thinking directed toward the early years of schooling (Follman, 1991; Nickerson, 1988). It was agreed that critical thinking was a desirable educational goal (Kennedy, Fisher, & Ennis, 1991) and that it should be promoted at all grade levels. Furthermore, the reports that most educational practices were not succeeding in promoting reasoning or critical thinking across the curriculum confirmed our own experiences and observations in schools (Boyer, 1983; Committee for Economic Development, 1985; Goodlad, 1983).

Thus, it was important to study the transfer of responsibility in literature discussions, where fostering critical thinking rather than comprehension was the primary objective. We began our investigation with the following questions: (1) What process enables the transfer of responsibility from teacher to students for elements of dialogical-thinking reading discussion?; and (2) What are student and teacher-researcher perspectives on the process used to transfer responsibility to students for elements of dialogical-thinking reading discussions?

Methodological Perspective

The manner in which we conducted this research best fits within the constructivist research paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Constructivists believe that knowledge is created, not discovered, and that qualitative analysis leads to understanding or making sense of human behavior and interaction. The meanings individuals ascribe to the world around them constitute their reality. When individuals share their perceptions and negotiate agreement about common meanings, this results in the social construction of meaning. From this philosophical perspective, the outcomes of inquiry "are themselves a literal creation or construction of the inquiry process" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 128). Guba and Lincoln (1989) note that "the ultimate pragmatic criterion for this methodology is that it leads to successively better understanding, that is, to making sense of the interaction in which one usually is engaged with others" (p. 89). In this study, we were the participants, together with the second-grade students. We shared all of the decisions and responsibilities involved in conducting the weekly literature discussion sessions. We took turns conducting the discussion sessions, which allowed both researchers and students to experience being involved in the discussions and being the observer. This sharing of roles and responsibilities reflects construction of the concept of participant observation in qualitative research.

As the research questions indicate, we initially directed our attention toward understanding what would develop when we purposefully engaged in a process of transferring responsibility to students. The plans we developed to pursue our research questions involved three phases of study representing points on a continuum from teacher-facilitated discussions to student-only, small group discussions. Our initial conception of these phases served as a provisional framework. We expected that the particular features and duration of each phase would be altered and shaped by us and the students as we reflected on our participation in the literature discussions. The description and analysis of what ultimately occurred during the three phases represent a blurring of the traditional separation between procedures and results in reports of instructional intervention studies. This blurring is consistent with Bogdan and Biklen's (1992) observation that, in qualitative inquiry, the direction of the research develops after the researcher has begun collecting data and in response to getting to know the participants.

Participants

University Teacher-Researcher

Michelle's interest in participating in this research came out of 10 years of studying and writing about critical thinking and how it could be promoted in conjunction with reading (Commeyras, 1989, 1990, 1993). From a personal perspective, she has been interested in this aspect of education because much of her own schooling seemed mind-numbing. The emphasis placed on memorizing so-called factual information and conforming to teacher agendas inspired in her various forms of rebellion. As a teacher educator

visiting classrooms, she continued to encounter educational practices that seemed to underestimate the intellectual ability of children.

During the course of this research, she was pursuing a reading odyssey to educate herself about post-modern, post-structuralist, and feminist perspectives on reading (Flynn & Schweickart, 1986), reasoning (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1993; Rooney, 1991), literacy (Brodkey, 1992), critical pedagogy and literacy (Luke & Gore, 1992; McLaren, 1988), and research methodology (Harding, 1991; Lather, 1991). In so doing, she reconsidered the viability of critical thinking as a means for educating students for social justice. Post-modern and post-structuralist critiques brought to her attention that, after centuries of education based on rational, logical thought, the world was still filled with power asymmetries that sustained and perpetuated sexism, heterosexism, racism, classism, as well as other forms of oppression. This challenged her belief that critical thinking and feminism, together, could contribute to a more just and democratic world.

While engaged in the conduct, analysis, and representation of this study, Michelle pondered the modernist presuppositions of critical thinking, whereby universal standards and principles are the basis for distinguishing between rational and irrational thought (Siegel, 1988). Central to critical thinking is the disposition of open-mindedness. This means seriously considering the merits of different points of view, reasoning from premises that negate one's own beliefs without letting that disagreement interfere with one's own reasoning, and withholding judgment when the evidence and reasons are insufficient (Ennis, 1987). She became concerned that critical thinking was based on the presumption that one could reason from some neutral and value-free stance. This conflicted with her growing feminist awareness that there was no such thing as an objectively neutral or disinterested perspective and that everyone is situated socially and historically. She realized that there might be an epistemological contradiction between promoting critical thinking during discussions of literature and an interpretivist/constructivist research methodology. Elsewhere, she has explored how critical thinking can contribute to inquiry that recognizes all human and scientific beliefs as socially situated by finding connections between the evolution of this research and feminist themes (Commeyras, 1994a).

Second-Grade Teacher-Researcher

Georgiana's interests in the study were essentially and logically pragmatic. She wanted to find ways of conducting literature discussions that would benefit all her students, regardless of their reading ability. Also, she saw a need for discussion formats that would elicit more student participation and less teacher talk. Her approach to literature discussions prior to the study was characteristically in the recitation mode. The following excerpt from a discussion audiotaped before the study began illustrates that in the beginning, Georgiana's discussion style followed the discourse pattern of teacher initiates, student responds, and teacher evaluates (Cazden, 1985; Mehan, 1979).

Sumner: In *Frog and Toad* when Frog lost his button, how did he describe the button?

Student: It was white.

Sumner: All right, so it was. . .

Students: white.

Sumner: white. . . .Did he use anything else to describe his button? Anything like "little"?

Student: He used four holes.

Sumner: Okay, does that describe how little it is?

Student: No.

Sumner: Was Frog and Toad's button small? (Sumner Discussion Transcript, 9/15/92)

Georgiana was concerned that this form of discussion did not engage enough of her students. She observed different kinds of teacher/student interactions and broader student participation when the dialogical-thinking discussion format was employed. Thus, after 16 years of teaching experience, 12 in second grade, she was eager to engage in research on literature discussions.

The research began with a conversation between Michelle and Georgiana about philosophies of teaching and approaches to teaching reading. Georgiana's comments indicated that, like many teachers, she is poised somewhere between the systematic teaching of reading skills and strategies, and the student-centered practices supported by the whole language philosophy. For example, in her classroom, students responded to their individual reading choices in a response journal. They were also grouped by ability for small-group reading instruction, which sometimes involved using basal reading materials. During whole-class sessions, she presented quality literature for discussion.

> I've gone from a fairly traditional three-group type of approach to a more whole language approach. I'm still working with that (*she laughs*). I love the whole language [but] I'm not finding enough time to meet individually with kids and have small groups. It's hard for me to say exactly what I'm going to be doing [because] it kind of depends on the group of kids. If I only have a couple of kids who really need that individualized work on skills, then I may keep it individualized for them. With the others, we do a lot of whole-group or partner-type things. (8/21/92)

Georgiana has three goals for her students: (1) to make a year's growth in reading on both formal and informal assessments; (2) to read everyday in school and every night at home; (3) to "see reading as fun." She believes that everything she wants to accomplish with her students depends on establishing a classroom atmosphere that is friendly, where students can take risks without anyone demeaning them. From the first day of class, they talk about how they are going to treat one another, and she insists that there "be no put-downs and that's from me, from my aide, and from other kids" (Research Conversation, 8/21/92).

Table 1. Phase One Procedures

Phase One: Original Plan
Dialogical-thinking reading discussions will be conducted by the classroom teacher or the university teacher with the whole class.
A story will be read to the students.
Through whole-class discussion, the students will generate and evaluate reasons for two plausible conclusions regarding a central story issue.
Students will be asked to write about their final conclusion regarding the central story issue.

Students

There were 18 second graders who participated consistently in this research throughout the school year (fictitious names are used to protect their anonymity). They lived in neighborhoods that include public housing, low-income rental housing, and middle- to upper-income subdivisions. There were 12 boys and 6 girls in the class; 9 students were European Americans, 8 were African Americans, and 1 was East Indian. At the beginning of the school year, Georgiana administered an informal reading inventory and found that students were reading from the preprimer level through grade 3. Her later assessment of their reading, in April, showed the range to be from first to fourth grade. The students' national percentile ranks on the reading portion of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills varied from 4% to 98%. There was a continuum of readers from those who were minimally fluent and infrequent readers to those who were exceptionally fluent and frequently chose to read. Nine students qualified for Chapter One services and 2 participated in a weekly pull-out program for gifted students. Two more students were considered gifted by Georgiana, but did not have the test scores to qualify. Thus, like many classrooms, it was a heterogenous group of students in many respects.

Method

Procedures

The plans for data collection involved three phases of study designed to represent points on a continuum, from teacher-facilitated discussions to student-only, small-group discussions. These phases were conceived as a framework for organizing the investigation of the process of transferring responsibility from teacher to student for elements of dialogical-thinking reading discussion. The features and duration of each phase could be (and were) altered in response to what was learned about our teacher-researcher participation in literature discussions over the course of the year. Describing our procedures requires revealing

the contrast between our initial plans and what actually transpired in each phase. This will set the scene for the analysis and interpretation of what we learned about students' questions and what the second graders learned about themselves as questioners.

Phase one. The original plan for Phase One was implemented without modification (see Table 1). There were seven dialogical-thinking discussions that occurred from September through November. Once a week, we took turns selecting a book and reading it to the students. Whoever was facilitating the discussion sat in the Author's Chair while students sat on the rug. After the reading, the facilitator presented a dialogical-thinking question. For example, after listening to Chris Van Allsberg's (1981) *Jumanji* (the name of a jungle adventure game), Georgiana asked the students to consider whether Peter and Judy should have taken the game home or left it in the park where they found it. Once their initial opinion was given, reasons to support either consideration were elicited. She recorded the students' reasons on large sheets of paper placed on an easel in the front of the classroom. Finally, they were asked to indicate by a show of hands which decision they favored. Following each discussion, students wrote about the conclusion they had arrived at and why. These discussions lasted from 30 to 45 min. We conducted interviews with students toward the end of Phase One. They were asked questions such as:

> "What do you think about the stories and discussions we have?"
>
> "Do you like to talk during the discussions?; Why or Why not?"
>
> "What ideas do you have that would make the discussions better?"

Phase two. There was a significant difference between the original plan for Phase Two and what occurred (see Table 2). Some of the changes resulted from consideration of students' interview responses along with our own views about the kind of responsibility for which students were ready. Most illuminating was their interest in posing discussion questions. Other changes evolved as our knowledge of student questioning increased.

We began Phase Two by exploring how to get students to pose a dialogical-thinking discussion question. Georgiana decided it was advisable to continue reading the stories to the class because of the range in students' reading ability. It also seemed important to continue the teacher-researcher shared experience of alternately facilitating and observing the weekly discussion sessions.

When transferring responsibility for posing discussion questions to students in Phase Two, it was assumed that certain kinds of questions promoted critical thinking. This was consistent with the educational practice of using question-classification systems to study teacher questioning (Gall, 1970). In those systems, questions are ordered hierarchically according to the levels of cognitive processing deemed necessary to answer them. We believed, like many other teachers, that "the particular level of intellectual functioning is influenced in part by the cognitive level of the question" (Hunkins, 1987, pp. 154–155). Therefore, in Phase Two, we expected students to learn to ask questions like those posed in the

Table 2. Contrast between Original and Amended Procedures for Phase Two

Phase Two: Original Procedures	Phase Two: Amended Procedures
Students read a story in pairs.	Students listen to a story.
Students will be given a dialogical-thinking question. They will work in pairs to identify a list of reasons to support two plausible conclusions.	The classroom teacher and university teacher take turns facilitating a whole-class discussion, where students offer questions for discussion. These questions are recorded on chart paper.
Students will meet in small groups with the classroom teacher or university teacher to discuss their reasons for two plausible conclusions regarding a central story issue.	In sessions 1-2, students select among their questions one to use in a dialogical-thinking discussion. In sessions 3-6, students select among their questions some for extended discussions. In sessions 7-10, students discuss all their questions.
Working in pairs, students will write about their final conclusion regarding the central story issue.	Students write in response to a discussion question.

Phase One discussions. During the first Phase Two discussion session, we directed the children to "think of a question we could discuss where there could be two opinions, two choices, either a 'yes' or a 'no' answer" (Sumner Discussion Transcript, 11/24/92). Instead, the students asked open-ended questions reflecting their desire to understand why and how things happened in the story. As illustrated in Table 3, these questions were very different from the decision-making or position-taking questions previously used to engage their critical thinking in Phase One.

After recording the students' questions about the Bluebonnet legend on the chart paper, Georgiana led the class in a brief consideration of each question, selecting one for the dialogical-thinking discussion: "Why did the girl throw the doll in the fire?" Since Georgiana recognized it as not fitting the pattern of question previously used, she said, "Ms. Commeyras, this is not a 'yes' or 'no' question, it's a 'why' question." Michelle replied, "Well, you could say, 'Should she have thrown the doll into the fire?'" Thus, in this first effort to transfer responsibility to students for questioning, we resorted to reformulating their question to fit the structure of dialogical-thinking discussion. This led us to conclude that this particular discussion format was incompatible with the kind of questions students were interested in discussing. We decided that, if we were sincerely interested and committed to handing over responsibility to students for generating discussion questions, then we needed to begin exploring a new approach. It was at this juncture that the research evolved into an exploration of how to conduct literature discussions based on student-posed questions.

Table 3. Contrast between Teacher-Posed Dialogical-Thinking Questions in Phase One and Open-ended Student-Posed Questions in First Discussion Session of Phase Two

Phase One: The teacher-posed dialogical-thinking questions used across seven discussions	Phase Two: The student-posed questions about *The Legend of Bluebonnet* (dePaola, 1983)
D1. Should Jimmy keep Robutt or get the earth dog?	1. Why did the girl throw the doll in the fire?
D2. Should the mayor encourage Henry to return?	2. Why do you think the Great Spirit returned her gift with flowers and rain?
D3. Should Judy and Peter take the game home or leave it in the park?	3. Why did none of the other Indians put their valued possessions in the fire?
D4. Did the shoemaker do the right thing?	4. Why didn't she go to sleep when the other Indians did?
D5. Should Wiley have gone into the swamp?	5. Why did the mother and daddy die?
D6. Is the dog waiting for a name?	6. Why did the grown-ups really care about her?
D7. Was the Whatzit real or Harry's imagination?	7. How did the girl feel when her parents and grandparents died?

During Phase Two, we experimented with procedures whereby students were asked to think of questions they would like to bring up for discussion as they listened to a story. Their questions were recorded on chart paper by the facilitator. A class discussion of the questions took place before students were directed to go to their desks and write about any question they found interesting.

At the end of the 10th discussion, we decided to hold interviews about the transformations that had taken place in Phase Two. Whole-class interview sessions were conducted on two consecutive days. We showed the children a video clip of their discussion of *The Black Snowman* (Mendez & Byard, 1989) and their discussion of *The King's Fountain* (Alexander & Keats, 1989), because questions were discussed differently in the two sessions.

> Georgiana: [For] *The King's Fountain*, you remember, you would give a question and then you would discuss it. Then you gave another question and you discussed it. With this one (*The Black Snowman*), you gave questions but we didn't talk about them until after you gave all the questions. (3/2/93)

Along with seeking students' perspectives and preferences on the changes in Phase Two, we also solicited their opinions about the kind

Table 4. Contrast between Original and Amended Procedures for Phase Three

Phase Three: Original Procedures	Phase Three: Amended Procedures
The students will read the story independently.	The students are read a story by their classroom or university teacher.
In preparation for discussion, students will independently identify reasons to support two plausible conclusions for a teacher's question.	Students independently write a list of questions they would like to discuss.
The dialogical-thinking reading discussion will be conducted by a student with a group of peers.	Students meet in groups of five to discuss their questions. Children take turns serving as discussion leader.
Students will be asked to write about their final conclusion regarding the central story issue.	Students are reconvened by their classroom teacher for a whole-class, follow-up discussion of their questions.

of responsibility they wanted to assume in Phase Three.

Commeyras: Do you think that you could have a discussion about a story without Ms. Sumner or me leading it? Do you think you could talk to each other and ask each other your questions? (3/3/93)

There was an enthusiastic, affirmative response, which led to a planning session in order to begin Phase Three the following week.

Phase three. The implementation of Phase Three differed from our original plan since we had abandoned the dialogical-thinking discussion format. Nevertheless, we did retain our original goal to have students engage in peer-led literature discussions (see Table 4).

There were eight discussion sessions in Phase Three, from March through May. In this final phase of the project, students listened to a story, then went to their desks to write all the questions they had about the story. After returning from Music class, they took their lists to a small student-only group discussion, where they took turns asking and answering each others' questions. After this, the class was reconvened and a general discussion about the questions was held with Georgiana. Toward the end of this general session, she always asked if there were any issues or problems that arose in their small groups that students wanted everyone to consider. Students usually had some concerns about their peer-group dynamics that they wanted to discuss and resolve.

At the end of the school year, a final group interview was conducted with the participating second graders, during which they commented on the kinds of literature discussions they had experienced across Phases One, Two, and Three. The following questions were representative of our teacher-researcher inquiry.

- How did you like it when the teachers thought of the question for discussion?
- What do you think about writing down your questions?
- Do you think that you thought more about a story when you knew you were going to be making up the questions? Do you think you thought more about it when you were making a decision on one question?
- Did you like whole group?
- Did you like small group?
- When you read by yourself or at home with a parent or brother or sister or friend, do you find yourself asking more questions than you did before?

Data Sources

Across all three phases of study, the whole-class discussion sessions were videotaped and audiotaped. This included 7 whole-group sessions in Phase One, 10 in Phase Two, and 8 in Phase Three. In addition, there were 32 audio recordings of the four peer literature discussion groups in Phase Three. This amounts to 57 recorded literature discussion sessions. The written work students did for each discussion was collected and copied. The chart paper used with each discussion was retained. These data sources document the number of student questions posed about literature that were analyzed. Across the 10 whole-class sessions in Phase Two, there were 79 questions recorded on chart paper for discussion. During the 8 sessions in Phase Three, students wrote 508 questions that were brought up for discussion in their peer-only discussion groups.

All student interview sessions were also either audiotaped or videotaped. The research conversations we had after discussion sessions, outside of school, and during 2 weeks of summer work, were either audiotaped or videotaped.

Literature discussions, based on second graders' questions that occurred in the two years following this study, have also been videotaped and transcribed for a new study (Commeyras, Mathis, & Sumner, 1995). These data have further informed the analyses conducted on our original pool of data.

Data Analysis

Intensive and detailed data analysis began with the process of transcribing the audiotaped and videotaped discussion and interview sessions. After assistants produced rough transcriptions, we worked on refining each transcript, reading each one while listening to or watching tapes. For example, student's names were added and speech deciphered; our familiarity with the children's voices and the substance of each discussion enabled us to ascertain most of what was difficult to understand in the tapes. In order to create as complete a transcript as possible, we listened as often as ten times to segments difficult to decipher due to overlapping speech, soft-spokeness, dialect, and the proximity of a student to the microphone.

Table 5. Types of Analytical Notes (Capital Letters) Added to Discussion Transcripts

	NUMBERED VERSION OF TUMPIE.ETH 7/7/1993		
			Page 2
Cooperative Learning	Austin:	Why did Eddie move?	94*
	Wendell:	Why did who move?	96
	Austin:	Eddie.	98
	Chad:	Who is Eddie?	100
	Austin:	The dad.	102
	Carl:	The real dad, who moved away.	104
	Chad:	You mean the dad moved away.	106
Analytical Note	GS:	BEGINNING OF STUDENT-TO-STUDENT CLARIFYING AND QUESTIONING.	108 109
			Page 5
Teachable Moments	Sumner:	Okay, he could play it where he was, but if he was in a band, a lot of times back then, they moved from city to city, they called it "on the road," and they moved from city to city and played in all the different cities.	242 243 244 245 246 247 248
Analytical Note	GS:	TEACHER ADDING INFORMATION NOT IN THE STORY, BUT CONNECTED TO THE STORY.	250 251 252
			Page 10
Student Initiative	Wendell:	I, I have a, a new question.	525
	Sumner:	A new question? Okay, you think we're ready for a new question?	527 528
	Students:	Yes.	530
Analytical Note	MC:	STUDENT INITIATES A CHANGE OF TOPIC. GS: WENDELL HAS A WONDERFUL WAY OF GETTING MY ATTENTION.	532 533 534

*Transcript of Line Number

			Page 11
Student Appraisal	Sumner:	Why does she get it? Um, that	584
		would be another question, wouldn't	585
		it? Can you hold on to that idea?	586
		Why don't, that might go with this,	587
		though, if you think about it. Did	588
		the farmers mind when Tumpie took the	589
		fruits and vegetables?	590
	Demetrius:	Um, no.	592
	Sumner:	Okay, how did you know that the	594
		farmers might not mind her doing it?	595
	Demetrius:	'Cause they were on the floor.	597
Analytical Note	GS:	HE'S REALLY BEEN LISTENING	599
		AND REMEMBERS POINTS IN THE STORY. GOOD	600
		MEMORY.	601
			Page 12
Teacher Reflection	Demetrius:	I got another question.	611
	GS:	GREAT! DEMETRIUS' STILL	613
Analytical Note		QUESTIONING. WISH I HAD REALIZED HOW	614
		IMPORTANT IT WAS TO GET DEMETRIUS' OTHER	615
		QUESTION—EVEN TO JUST LET HIM	616
		VERBALIZE IT.	617
			Page 19
Student Thinking	Julie:	Because in the book when um, she	655
		went to go get the fruits and	656
		vegetables, the farmer saw her and	657
		they, they, they were smiling at her	658
		and they really didn't mind.	659
	GS:	GOOD POINT TO SHOW FARMERS'	661
Analytical		ATTITUDES.	662
Note	MC:	REASON 2—NOT A REASON WHY	663
		THEY DIDN'T MIND, RATHER A REASON	664
		TO SUPPORT BELIEVING THEY DIDN'T MIND.	665
			Page 21
Student Engagement	Nadine:	But I was going to ask something	1112
		about that one.	1113
	GS:	NADINE IS PAYING ATTENTION	1115
Analytical		BETTER THAN USUAL.	1116
Note	MC:	STILL THINKING ABOUT PREVIOUS	1117
		QUESTION. A SIGN OF ENGAGEMENT.	1118

Numbered Version of File NEESIE.ETH 7/7/1993 07:51		Page 8
Austin:	You put mother mother.	426
Julie:	Yeah, you did. You put mother	428
	mother.	429
GS:	THEY'RE READING WHAT'S	431
	WRITTEN—READING FOR A PURPOSE.	432
MC:	THEY ARE CAREFULLY MONITORING	433
	OUR RECORDING OF THEIR THINKING.	434
Commeyras:	Oh, thank you. . .	436

Figure 1. Illustration of convergence with regard to analytical notes in a Phase Two discussion on *Me & Neesie* (Greenfield & Barnett, 1975).

While refining the transcripts, we wrote analytical notes in the margins of each transcript. These notes were later incorporated into the body of each transcript in capital letters so they could be distinguished easily from the original dialogue. A representative sample of the type of notes we made across transcripts is presented in Table 5 with examples from the Phase Two discussion of *Ragtime Tumpie* (Shroeder & Fuchs, 1989).

Independent analyses of transcripts often yielded convergence in thinking. In terms of qualitative methods, this is akin to investigator triangulation, whereby several researchers participate in analyzing and interpreting data (Denzin, 1978). For example, in the following data excerpt, we both commented on a time when students noticed a mistake in the recording of a question (see Figure 1).

Singular analytical notes often confirmed our converging insights. Later in the same transcript, Georgiana noted another example of attention being paid to question wording (see Figure 2).

After refining every transcript and writing analytical notes, we considered what seemed significant about each discussion. As a result, summary comments were appended to the transcripts, which represented the patterns and issues identified within each discussion. When summary comments were similar across discussions, a pattern or issue seemed particularly significant, as illustrated with excerpted summary comments from two discussion transcripts (see Figure 3).

The process of writing analytical notes and developing summary comments enabled us to identify that articulating, wording, and recording students' questions were worthy of continued analysis and interpretation. Future directions for additional data analyses were identified that Michelle would pursue, because Georgiana's

Numbered Version Of File NEESIE.ETH 7/7/1993 07:51		Page 9
Commeyras:	Oh, is it "what" or "did" Neesie go out?	462 463
Derrick:	Did.	465
GS:	WORD USAGE AGAIN IMPORTANT TO MEANING.	467 468

Figure 2. Illustration of confirmatory singular analytical notes.

Numbered Version Of File SNOWMAN.ETH 7/6/1993 07:44		Page 39
SUMMARY COMMENTS.		2115
3.	WHAT GETS RECORDED ON THE CHART MATTERS TO THE STUDENTS. THEY WANT IT DONE RIGHT.	2131 2132 2133
Numbered Version Of File SEALMOTH.ETH 7/6/1993 08:07		**Page 19**
SUMMARY COMMENTS		1020
1.	STUDENTS SEEM TO BE PAYING MORE ATTENTION TO THE WRITING OF QUESTIONS USING THE EXACT WORDS NEEDED GRAMMATICALLY FOR MEANING.	1024 1025 1026 1027

Figure 3. Excerpted summary comments that represent a pattern across transcripts.

return to teaching after the summer precluded her continued involvement. Subsequently, however, Georgiana has read and contributed comments to this manuscript, and continues to confirm the trustworthiness of the ongoing analysis and interpretation of data.

Further analyses involved pursuing more systematically findings from our shared

summer analysis. In some cases, this called for additional coding. For example, Phase Two data were coded for instances in which: (1) student questions were recorded on chart paper; (2) student questions were not recorded on chart paper; and (3) student questions were reworded before being recorded. This contributed further to our study of what students were learning about questioning and how we dealt with students' questions. Other analyses involved charting how often students participated, as well as the nature of their participation. Data analysis involved reading and rereading 1,300 pages of data to identify interview statements, discussion events, and conversational exchanges related to: (a) students' ways of thinking; (b) students' ways of interacting with each other and with teachers; and (c) ways in which the teacher-researchers conducted/facilitated the whole-class, literature discussions. Data analysis also involved returning to the interview and research conversation data to examine whether there was convergence between student and teacher-researcher perspectives, and developing interpretations of the literature discussion data. In the findings, parallels are illustrated that were found among student interviews, research conversations, and discussion transcripts. By analyzing across multiple data sources, we were able to provide for data triangulation (Denzin, 1978).

Findings

The results of the interpretive analyses are organized according to two themes: what the teacher-researchers learned about student-posed discussion questions and what the students learned. The approach to data representation reflects a new understanding following two weeks of data analysis. During the final research conversation (7/20/93), we had the following exchange.

Michelle: One of the research questions that led me to come to you was, "What process enables the transfer from teacher to students for elements of these dialogical-thinking reading lessons. And, lately, as I look at that question . . . I believe *they taught us*, we didn't transfer responsibility to them.

Georgiana: They sort of took it.

Michelle: Yeah. It's more about what they taught us than what we taught them.

Georgiana: In the final interview they said, "We learned by talking to each other. We learned by asking our own questions." You and I didn't ask them how they learned. They came up with the word "learn." . . .They knew they had learned something.

Since we agreed that we had learned from the second graders and that the second graders told us they had been learning, it seemed important to use that distinction in presenting the findings.

What Students Learned

We pay attention to the wording of questions.

Julie: I think we pay more attention to the story when we get to make up the questions.

(Interview, 6/2/93)

By the end of the school year, Julie realized that asking questions depended on a certain level of understanding. This is precisely J. T. Dillon's (1986) thesis regarding the relationship between student questions and individual learning. A student's "question affords insight into the nature and extent of that student's knowledge" (p. 344). The second graders demonstrated an awareness that, in formulating their questions, they should bring to bear their understandings of the story. This was evident in the ways in which they participated in developing and refining questions.

In the following dialogue from our discussion of *Harriet Tubman* (Meyer & Kerstetter, 1988), the students were considering whether to include the word "always" in a question based on the text and an illustration.

Julie: Why did the lady always stand in the way?

Ashley: Harriet Tubman.

Commeyras: (*Writing while speaking*: Why did Harriet)—Can I use her name?

Julie: Yes.

Commeyras: (*Writing while speaking*: always stand in the way?)

Julie: Stand in the way of the block.

Commeyras: You mean that thing that was thrown?

Victor: The iron.

Commeyras: The iron.

Ashley: But she didn't always stand in the way. Because that's the only time we knew of that she did.

Commeyras: Julie, did you hear what she said?

Julie: Yeah. She did stand in the way then.

Ashley: I know, but that was the only time. So we couldn't say she "always" stood in the way.

Commeyras: Do any others of you have ideas about Julie's question?

Nadine: Well, she didn't stand in the way always of the iron. . . .

Wendell: You see, like she didn't stand in the way of the iron.

Julie: Why did she stand in the way of the iron?

Commeyras: Okay, we'll take out the "always."

The question we recorded was: "Why did Harriet Tubman stand in the way of the iron?" The clarity and specificity of Julie's original question were improved upon by her classmates' attention to it.

The students' attentiveness to the wording also was evident when they found errors in how a question was being recorded on chart paper. In the following example from the discussion of *The Legend of Bluebonnet* (dePaola, 1983), this occurred after the students had considered different ways of wording the question.

Rehana:	Is the doll going to come alive?
Carl:	Is the doll going to turn to life?
Austin:	Going to come to life, not turn to life.
Sumner:	Could we say come alive? Would that mean the same thing as turn to life? Is the doll going to come alive?
Rehana:	Yes.
James:	But you forgot to put "to"—It says, "Is the doll going come alive."
Sumner:	Thank you, James.
Tonya:	That's what I was looking at.

Over the course of the literature discussions, the students exhibited their adeptness at articulating questions and sensitivity to subtle shifts in the meaning of questions, depending on the wording. The students continued to attend to the wording of questions in their Phase Three small-group discussion sessions. For example, Clayton pointed out a significant error in Victor's question about *The Wednesday Surprise* (Bunting & Carrick, 1989).

Victor:	Why did her grandmother know how to read?
Clayton:	Know how to read?
Victor:	Yeah.
Clayton:	But she didn't know how to read.
Victor:	Oh, I forgot to put "didn't."
Clayton:	Oh, okay. . . .That's the same one I had.

The students' attentiveness to the wording of questions and how it affects meaning did not result from any systematic, explicit instruction on how to word questions. The only exchanges that might be labeled instructional occurred in the course of helping students formulate questions they wanted to ask.

We have lots of questions, and we learn by asking them.

Victor:	I like writing down questions because you can get ideas.
Wendell:	I think we're asking more questions because you can't learn unless you ask questions.

(Group Interview, 6/2/93)

During Phase Three, students went to their desks after hearing a story and wrote down all the questions they wanted to bring to their peer discussion groups. The class as a whole generated 35 to 115 questions per story. This proliferation of questions was in sharp contrast to the number of questions recorded for discussion in the Phase Two sessions (3 to 11). Students found that the opportunity to write questions and participate in small-group discussions gave them more freedom to discover their ideas.

As an illustration, we refer to their questions based on their reading of *Amazing Grace* (Hoffman & Binch, 1991). Grace is a young girl of African descent, who loves to act out adventure stories and fairy tales. When her teacher asks for volunteers to play the part of Peter Pan in the school production, Grace raises her hand along with other interested students. Two classmates comment that Peter Pan is a boy and not Black. When Grace returns home, she shares these objections with her mother and grandmother who assure her that "you can be anything you want, Grace, if you put your mind to it." When the auditions are held, Grace is chosen by her classmates to play the leading role.

The second graders wrote 81 questions after hearing Grace's story. The question asked by students more than any other was: "Why did she want to play Peter Pan?" (10 students). There were other questions that occurred to more than one student (e.g., "Why did the class pick Grace to be Peter Pan?"). There were also 42 questions that were unique, which covered a wide array of topics. The illustrations, for example, inspired many original questions (e.g., "Why did the cat go everywhere with Grace?"). There were questions about things that were not explained or included in the story (e.g., "Where is Grace's father?"). Students were inquisitive about Grace's imagination and her love of acting (e.g., "Why did she imagine that she was acting the stories that she heard?"). Many students had questions about the incident in which Grace's classmates objected to her interest in trying out for the part of Peter Pan (e.g., "Why didn't Grace argue when Natalie said she couldn't be Peter Pan?"). And, there were questions that indicated some students were thinking more broadly about issues of gender and race with regard to Grace wanting and getting the part of Peter Pan (e.g., "Why did they pick a girl to be Peter Pan?" and "Could there be a Black Peter Pan?"). This sampling is representative of the richness of questions and topics students were interested in exploring through discussion.

In each Phase Three discussion, there was some overlap in students' questions, as well as diversity with regard to content, but in every discussion students asked more "why" questions. Of the 508 questions written about eight stories, 64.5% began with "why." In their book on questioning and learning, Morgan and Saxton (1991), contend that "why" questions are the great educational questions because they motivate us to discover and understand our world. Thomas (1988) has written that "thinking about why questions—and answers—gets to the center of what teaching is all about, touching on motivation, behavior, and learning itself" (p. 552). The fact that "why" was on the minds of the second graders more often than "how" (11.8%) or "what" (7.8%)

suggests that they were engaged in the kind of thinking that teacher questioning is supposed to elicit. When given the opportunity to write questions, these 7- and 8-year-old children explored many issues in order to make sense of their reading and their lives.

We learn by talking together.

Derrick: When you talk, it might be something important to know, and when you grow up you might know it. (Interview, 6/2/93)

Ashley: In our group. . .we sort of took the question and sort of took it like into real life. . . .We talked about sort of boy-girl relationships in real life for the answers. And we sort of got off the questions and then we had to come back. (Discussion, 4/12/93)

The students appreciated the opportunity to talk with one another because they viewed it as a way of coming to know important things. Their discussions lead them to grapple with issues that are bound to be relevant to their future lives. After listening to *The Paper Bag Princess* (Munsch & Martchenko, 1980), they wanted to know why Princess Elizabeth calls Prince Ronald "a bum" because, in the first illustration, she is gazing fondly at her betrothed. Their approaching marital bliss gets interrupted by a dragon who destroys the Princess's castle, burns all her clothes, and carries off the Prince. Elizabeth, wearing only a paper bag, rescues Ronald by outsmarting the dragon. When she succeeds, Ronald reacts by admonishing her for being "a smelly mess" and tells her to come back when she is "dressed like a real princess." Consequently, Elizabeth decides he is unworthy of her and refuses to marry him.

In the course of discussing the story, students explored the complexities of romantic relationships and gender expectations. They speculated that being rescued by Elizabeth made Ronald uncomfortable.

Ashley: She was trying to help him, but he didn't want any help.

Wendell: Maybe Elizabeth thought that Ronald wanted help, but he really didn't, and Ronald just got real upset when Elizabeth tried to help him because Elizabeth was all dirty.

Lisa: The prince doesn't like ah, [the] princess to help him 'cause it should be the prince helping the princess.

The idea that Ronald might not have wanted Elizabeth's help was followed by a comment that directed our attention to the beginning of the book.

Austin: Maybe he didn't like the princess in the front part of the story.

Sumner: What did it say in the beginning of the story?

Ashley: They wanted to marry.

Austin: Nuh-hunh, it said that the princess wanted to marry the prince. . . .

Sumner: So in the beginning of the story, they did seem to like each other?

Wendell: Yes.

Austin: I don't know if the prince liked the princess.

The distinction that Austin was making between what Elizabeth wanted and what Ronald wanted became clearer to us when Keisha made an observation about the illustration.

Sumner: So, if they wanted to get married, it takes two people, doesn't it?

Keisha: Yeah, but the lady had the hearts, and then the man was standing all like that (*she demonstrates his posture of indifference*).

Sumner: Excuse me?

Keisha: She liked the prince, [but] it looked like the prince didn't like the princess, how he was being in the first beginning.

Sumner: Well, we can look back here I guess and see. (*Reads from text*: "Elizabeth was a beautiful princess. She lived in a castle and had expensive princess clothes. She was going to marry a prince named Ronald.") Okay, Keisha's made a very good point. Look at this picture.

In the picture, the princess is smiling and facing toward Ronald. There are small red hearts circling her head. In contrast, Ronald is facing away from Elizabeth with a disinterested expression and no red hearts around him.

Austin: See, the prince doesn't like the princess.

Sumner: Do you agree with what Keisha said?

Students: Yeah.

When Austin expressed the belief that the prince was never in love with the princess, and Keisha found evidence for the idea in an illustration, it was an illuminating moment for everyone. It contributed to understanding why the prince was ungrateful and why the princess thought he was a bum.

Throughout our lives, we use questions to gain information and seek understanding regarding matters that range from the mundane to the profound. The second graders were learning that talking with others was one way of gaining knowledge and understanding that contributed to making one's way in the world.

What the Teachers Learned

All students' questions are discussion questions.

Michelle: I know that we tried to guide them to ask what we thought were discussion questions, and now I am at a point where I'm thinking that every question is a discussion question. It doesn't have to be the kind of question I used to think made for a good discussion.

Georgiana: I like things to be open-ended. . . . When I listen to the tapes and read transcripts, I realize I like it even more open than I thought I did. (Research Conversation, 7/20/93)

During the Phase Two whole-class discussions, we involved the students in thinking about which of their questions would be most interesting and important to discuss. They were asked to see which ones could be figured out and which really had lots of different opinions. Basically, we were asking the students to distinguish between questions that they could answer easily versus questions that required more thought. We wanted to move toward a more open discussion format that would allow students freedom to pursue the questions they viewed as deserving of discussion. Upon closer analysis of the transcripts, it seemed that the journey toward a student-centered view of questioning was not easy or direct. For example, during the sixth discussion in Phase Two on *Sam, Bangs, and Moonshine* (Ness, 1966), Georgiana resisted when students wanted to discuss a question she thought was unanswerable.

The discussion was about Sam, the daughter of a fisherman, who tells even stranger stories than those the sailors bring home from the sea. She describes her mother as a mermaid who lives in a cave behind Blue Rock. Most everyone in town knows that Sam's mother is dead. One of the questions indicated a student's interest in the reason for the mother's death.

Demetrius: Why does her mother die?

Sumner: Did the story give us any information on that?

Demetrius: No.

Sumner: So, could we answer it even if we discussed it?

Demetrius: No.

(*Other students are saying both "yes" and "no."*)

Wendell: We could put it up there and discuss it. We might figure something out. We could have our own opinions.

Sumner: Okay. We might be able to figure out for ourselves, even if the story didn't tell us.

Georgiana's initial reaction to Demetrius' question was dismissive because she saw no basis given in the story for speculating about the mother's death. Wendell persuaded her that the question should be recorded on the chart by reminding her that they were to think of questions with "a whole lot of answers" and where "there can be a lot to think about" (Sumner Discussion Transcript, 2/2/93). After all questions had been recorded and Demetrius' question was considered, Georgiana continued to promote the idea that it was not suitable for discussion.

Sumner: When did Sam's mother die? How or why did she die?

Demetrius: We don't know that one.

Sumner: We don't know that one? Okay, Demetrius, why don't we know that one?

Demetrius: Because they didn't tell us.

Sumner: They really didn't tell us. We could come up with some ideas, but that might not be [a question] that we actually could talk about.

Other students were not ready to abandon the question about Sam's mother and offered ideas drawing upon story events and details. Sumner responded by asking whether or not there were "clues" in the story that would support their ideas.

Austin: Maybe the tide washed her away.

Sumner: Do we have clues?

Derrick: I bet she died on a blue rock.

Sumner: Do we have any clues in this book that tell us how Sam's mother died?

Students: No.

Sumner: We really don't.

Georgiana's comments indicated that there was not enough information for speculation, but the students persevered with hypotheses based on story elements.

Wendell: Maybe the tide washed her away.

Sumner: All of those are good answers.

Derrick: I know why she died.

Wendell: Maybe she thinks her mom's a mermaid because the tide washed her away.

Sumner: Wendell, good idea, but the book doesn't give us many clues.

When we had time to study the transcript, we realized that the ideas offered by Austin, Derrick, and Wendell were textually appropriate in thinking about the death of Sam's mother. If their discussion of this question had continued, perhaps they might have developed and integrated their ideas and created an explanation, such as:

- Sam's mother was washed away during a storm and later found dead at Blue Rock.
- Sam's way of dealing with this tragedy and her sorrow is to imagine that her mother is happily living as a mermaid in a cave behind Blue Rock.

Thus, an answer to Demetrius' question could have integrated world knowledge and psychological interpretation with story details.

Throughout Phase Two, we continually examined our efforts to get second graders to view some questions as good for discussion while dismissing other questions. In our research conversation immediately following the discussion of *Sam, Bangs, and Moonshine* (Ness, 1966), we decided that it was time to "just let them discuss the questions as they come to them" (Research Conversation, Sumner, 2/2/93). We were ready to give up the idea that it was

necessary "to focus on whether or not they know which are good discussion questions because they're basically just giving us discussion questions" (Research Conversation, Commeyras, 2/2/93). At this point, we were poised between believing that the students had learned to ask "good" discussion questions and believing that whatever questions they wanted to talk about were, indeed, "good" discussion questions. By the end of the year-long study, we concluded that all questions students posed were viable for discussion (see Commeyras, 1994b, for additional analyses). In our concluding summer research conversation (7/20/93), Georgiana was succinct in saying, "Another teacher asked me, 'What if they don't ask good questions?' [Well] any question is a good question. I just think it's important that the kids think that."

How students learn to articulate their questions.

Michelle: I've noticed in reading the transcripts, they were paying attention to what we were writing. And they were getting involved in question construction and how meaning can be conveyed differently. . . .We had natural learning without a direct lesson.

Georgiana: There were instances where I could identify specific skills that they were having trouble with. Such as, how to ask a question, question words, the difference between a "how" and a "why." And . . . through the process, they all of a sudden understood that.
(Research Conversation, 7/20/93)

During a final interview (6/2/93), Nadine proclaimed, "we need to ask questions and we need to do it all by ourselves sometimes." She, along with her classmates, had come to value the importance of asking questions without being guided or helped by the teacher. This independent, confident, questioning spirit came about because of the many opportunities the students were given to ask their questions, and the support they received from each other and their adult teachers. One might think that you simply encourage children to ask any questions they have about a story. However, we found that sometimes second graders had difficulty articulating their questions, and sometimes we had difficulty knowing how to record their questions. For example, in the first few sessions when questions were solicited, some students offered a statement instead of a question. We had to show them how their ideas could be phrased as questions. Nadine got some help posing a question during the second discussion in Phase Two on *Me & Neesie* (Greenfield, 1975).

Nadine: Neesie looked like she was standing by, ah, um. I mean, there looks like there was no one under the bed, when the covers were over it.

Commeyras: Is that a question or a statement? Can you make it a question?

Nadine: Um, there could—there looked like there wasn't nobody underneath the bed?

Commeyras: There looked like there was nobody under the bed? Is that your

question? I think we could reword it. Are you wondering, "Was she really *in* the bed?"

Nadine: Unhuh.

Commeyras: Could I put it that way?

What becomes complex for the teacher is how to help without altering what the student is intending to ask. In attempting to help Nadine pose her question, Michelle may have inadvertently changed her intended meaning. It is doubtful that Nadine really meant "underneath the bed," because in the story it says that the character had "kept her head under the covers." One safeguard in trying to do justice to a child's thinking is to ask him or her to verify if the wording of the question you are offering fits their intention.

By the fifth discussion in Phase Two, Nadine's question-posing had become more intelligible. In the following excerpt from our discussion of *The Seal Mother* (Gerstein, 1986), her classmates were able to offer assistance because her wording was clearer.

Nadine: Um, why did the mother, why did the mother, um, get her skin off?

Commeyras: Why did the mother get her skin off?

Austin: Take her skin off, you mean?

Nadine: Take her skin off.

Commeyras: Okay, (writes) why did the mother take her skin off?

Approximately half (54%) of the 79 questions recorded during the 10 whole-class discussions in Phase Two were recorded exactly as stated by a child. This occurred when the intent of the question was clear and it was concisely worded (e.g., "Why didn't she go to sleep when the other Indians did?"). The other questions were mediated in one way or another through teachers or other students. At first, placing students in charge of posing questions in literature discussions seemed fairly straightforward, but we learned that sometimes they have difficulty finding the words to express their thoughts. Helping them in ways that do not misrepresent their thinking requires careful listening and assurances that your desire is to understand precisely what it is they want to ask.

The various ways in which students received help with questioning reflect the six overlapping characteristics of instructional scaffolding that Meyer (1993) synthesized from the literature. First, the purpose was to transfer to the students responsibility for posing questions to discuss after listening to a story (transfer of responsibility). Second, our role as discussion facilitator was to support the articulation of questions that were important to the students (teacher support). Third, the students were first introduced to posing questions during whole-class sessions where dialogues occurred about the phrasing of questions (dialogue). Fourth, we realized the importance of helping students pose any question they had, regardless of our teacher notions of what constitutes a good discussion question (non-evaluative collaboration). Fifth, we assumed that given opportunity and

support, all students could articulate questions (appropriateness of the instructional level). Sixth, we found that student questioning was enabled when the students reacted and helped one another articulate questions. Our role as discussion facilitators was to give careful consideration to what was said and ensure that students were the final judges about the suitability of a question (Co-participation).

Students' questions led to critical thinking and problem-solving.

Georgiana: What I noticed after the project, or really within the project, [was that] they were constantly problem solving in their discussions. When they disagreed or agreed, they had to give reasons. And they had to support their reasons —that's part of problem-solving.

Michelle: It's fun for me to find out what their perspective is and what is important. I'm thinking of something I was looking at the other day in *The Paper Bag Princess*. They were discussing whether or not the dragon really flew around the world in ten seconds or whether he just went and hid behind a corner. That's not something I would ever think about, but it was fun to hear them think about it.

(Research Conversation, 7/20/93)

From the outset, this study was concerned with promoting students' thinking and reasoning, and abandoning the dialogical-thinking discussion format did not diminish this. Allowing students to determine questions for discussion was yet another opportunity to foster the kinds of thinking that are viewed as important educational goals. Analyses of the transcripts reveal a myriad of ways in which second graders engaged in critical thinking and problem solving. For example, during a Phase Three discussion of *Amazing Grace* (Hoffman & Binch, 1991), Nadine asked her peers, "Why were two of her friends mean to her?" When her question was later discussed by the whole class, two classmates challenged her inference that the story characters who objected to Grace being Peter Pan were her friends.

Julie: Why would they be her friends?

Lisa: Maybe they're not her friends.

Nadine's question assumes friendship, which is not stated in the book. Julie's and Lisa's questions represent, with regard to critical thinking, the ability to identify unstated assumptions. The ensuing discussion yielded more critical thinking as students analyzed an illustration that shows Grace and others volunteering for parts in the play by raising their hands. The class wondered why Raj objected to Grace playing a boy's role but not to Natalie, whose hand was also raised.

Lisa: Look, I think, I think [Raj] said she's a girl, [Grace] can't be the Peter Pan. But [Natalie's] a girl, too, and she want to raise her hand too.

Sumner: Natalie has her hand up, too, for Peter Pan.

Ashley: And Raj didn't say anything to Natalie, so why should he say anything to Grace?

The students' observation raised an issue that we suspect goes beyond anything the illustrator considered when she created a picture to accompany the text. The students' attentiveness to the details in the illustration raised the issue of Grace, Raj, and Natalie's competition for the part of Peter Pan. They explored why Raj might have objected to Grace but not Natalie.

Austin: Maybe, maybe Raj is Natalie's best, best friend or something.

Ashley: I know what. It makes a difference because Grace is black and Natalie is white. But white shouldn't make the difference, because they're both sort of the same and it doesn't matter really what color they are. But Raj didn't say anything to Natalie and he said something to Grace.

The students' search for reasons that would explain Raj's comment to Grace led them to realistic considerations regarding biases such as personal attachment or racial prejudice. The discussion of why Grace's "friends" were mean to her was sophisticated, because students used their critical thinking abilities to consider different plausible explanations and to explore the potential influence of favoritism, competitiveness, racism, and aptitude.

There were teachable moments and incidental learning.

Georgiana: If the statement I wrote on the chart didn't say exactly what they wanted it to say, whether it needed a comma or a possessive, or whatever, or even a word, they might change a vocabulary word in there. They were using English grammar skills to clarify what they wanted on the chart. . . .I thought, "Gee, I could have taught that for weeks in the English book. They probably would have never gotten it."

(Research Conversation, 7/20/93)

During literature discussions, we observed that students were learning in ways that addressed many of the designated second-grade educational objectives, and this was further verified by transcript analysis. During Phase Two, there were instances in every discussion session when the recording of student questions resulted in impromptu teaching and/or practice that met state core curriculum objectives for Reading and Language Arts. This is illustrated in Table 6 with a brief excerpt from the discussion of *The Black Snowman* (Mendez & Byard, 1989). Three different aspects of language learning occurred in succession: oral communication–speaking; written communication–reading; written communication–writing.

There were also opportunities to teach the students to reread for understanding, another state-wide curriculum objective for all elementary school students. Whenever students seemed confused about aspects of a story, we would reread portions of text to them, a common occurrence in Phase Two. For example, while discussing *The Seal Mother* (Gerstein, 1990), a difference of opinion led to rereading and close examination of an illustration.

Commeyras: (*Reading from the chart*: When the seals were dancing and laughing,

Table 6. The Identification of Grade-Two Learning Objectives Met During a Literature Discussion

	The Black Snowman Discussion	Quality Core Curriculum Objectives for Grade Two
Sumner:	Why did Jacob—read it for me.	ORAL COMMUNICATION—SPEAKING
Chorus:	Why did Jacob save his brother? (*Students are reading along as Sumner writes the words.*)	
Students:	Life.	Communicates effectively
Sumner:	You want to add "life?"	
Students:	Yes.	
Sumner:	Would it mean the same thing? (*Writing*: Why did Jacob save his brother's life)	WRITTEN COMMUNICATION—READING
Students:	Yes.	
Sumner:	The life belongs to his brother, right?	Interprets semantic relationships
Carl:	You didn't put the. . .	WRITTEN COMMUNICATION—WRITING
Sumner:	I didn't put what?	
Carl:	The question mark.	
Sumner:	You're proofreading for me.	Editing for punctuation

was the mother there with him?) Does anyone think they have an answer to that?

Ashley: I think the mom might've been there with them because he wouldn't be there alone because the little boy was all grown up and his mother probably wanted to come and see him.

Julie: That's what I was going to say.

Austin: The book didn't say that.

Commeyras: I think maybe we should just look back at that part. . . . (*reads from book and shows accompanying illustration*).

Derrick: Look at the mother on the boat (*excitedly pointing at illustration*).

The discussion developed as the students carefully examined the illustration and considered the storyline. They appreciated the usefulness of returning to the text, because it occurred in response to what they were interested in understanding. Analyses revealed that this carried over to their peer group discussions in Phase Three.

Early on in Phase Three, we learned that it was important to make available to each group a copy of the book being discussed. Students kept asking to take the book back to their group so text and illustrations could be reread. This is illustrated with an excerpt from the discussion of *Horrible Harry's Secret* (Kline & Remkiewicz, 1990), when a student read to her group because they were having difficulty understanding one of the story events.

Lisa: Someone said I was named after him.

Chad: Somebody said their grandfather was named after him.

Lisa: I was. I, my grandfather's name was Bong.

Keisha: See, (*pointing to an illustration*) this is not him. He's him right there.

Lisa: Okay, let me read it. (*Reading*: "Does your frog have a name?" Ms. Mackle asked. "Bong," Song Lee said softly. Sidney laid his ruler on his desk so that eight inches of it was sticking out. Then he hit the end of it. "Bong! Bong! Bong!" Harry held up his fist. "Don't make fun of a frog's name." "I'm just making good music," Sidney replied. . . .) (Kline & Remkiewicz, 1990, pp. 4–5)

Determining that literature discussions based on student-posed questions addressed an array of reading, writing, and oral language grade-level objectives was particularly significant to Georgiana. It provides an educational justification to those who might question the amount of time she was allowing students to "talk" about books in Phases Two and Three (2–3 hr per book). To an untrained eye, the lengthy peer- and whole-class discussions might have seemed an indulgence. Documenting the opportunities that arise for embedded instruction, practice, and review of skills in literature discussions is reassuring to those who are more comfortable and familiar with explicit, systematic skill and strategy instruction.

The teachers got the "treatment."

Commeyras: They continued to take responsibility and made it easy for us to be more and more open, made it safe for us to be open.

Sumner: The more I backed out of it, the better their discussions got, and I want to remember that.
(Research Conversation, 7/20/95)

Table 7. Comparison of Questions by Second Graders from the Study and a New Class of Second-Grade Students

Class of 1992/93	Class of 1993/94
1. Where was Neesie when Janell went home?	1. Does Neesie have a Mom or Dad?
2. Was Neesie really in the bed?	2. Where did Neesie come from?
3. Where was Neesie—under the bed or in the covers?	3. Where did Neesie go at the end of the book?
4. Why didn't Neesie go to school with Janell?	4. Why didn't Neesie want to go to school?
5. Were Janell and Neesie in the same classroom?	5. If Janell had new friends at school, why'd she want to play with Neesie?
6. Was Neesie really there?	6. Why did Neesie leave?
7. How could only Janell see Neesie?	7. Why would Neesie not wait for Janell to come home from school?
8. Were Janell and Neesie sisters?	8. Why was Neesie so sad?
9. Why didn't Janell keep her promise to her mother about not mentioning Neesie in front of Aunt Bea?	
10. Why didn't Neesie get up when Aunt Bea was going to sit on her?	
11. Did Neesie go out the window when Janell went to school?	

In the years following this study, we have come to realize that the three phases used to transfer responsibility to students for posing literature discussion questions were, in the language of experimental intervention studies, a "treatment" for us. Our experience conducting literature discussions in subsequent years has disabused us of the view that the gradual release of responsibility to students for posing questions was responsible for the success of student questioning with this class of second-grade students. For example, during the next school year, Michelle videotaped Georgiana and her new class of second-graders as they engaged in a discussion of *Me & Neesie* (Greenfield & Barnett, 1975) based on their questions during the second week of school. The questions that were raised and discussed were, in

many regards, similar to those of the previous year's Phase Two discussion of the same book. This is apparent when comparing questions across the two classes (see Table 7).

With each successive year that Georgiana conducts whole-class discussions based on student-posed questions, we find additional evidence that a gradual release or transfer of responsibility is unnecessary. When students understand that they are to ask questions about what they find interesting, curious, or confusing, they provide the "right" questions for discussion. We have concluded that this study was more about the process we as teachers had to undergo. Simultaneously, it provided us with the opportunity to engage in a detailed analysis of ways students learn as they raise the questions they have about literature.

Discussion

If we had written and published the results of our initial study instead of collecting additional data on literature discussions based on students' questions, we might have concluded that the three phases in our study were responsible for the quality and quantity of questions exhibited by the second-grade class of 1992/93. Our decision to undertake a second teacher-research project (Commeyras et al., 1995) revealed that a new class of second graders generated questions that were similar in quality to those generated in Phases Two and Three of this study. The data collected each subsequent school year have confirmed that we needed to experience the process in order to accept that students have the ability to ask educationally valuable questions. The paucity of questioning by students in schools has more to do with teachers' lack of regard for students' questioning ability than it does with students' need to be taught questioning skills. We also suggest that findings from instructional studies may be significantly informed by follow-up studies.

This study supports the following. First, the students were motivated. It is evident that the 7- and 8-year-old children were eager to pose questions that addressed what they needed and wanted to understand about literature and life. When given the opportunity to write, they generated numerous and varied questions. They listened carefully to each other and willingly participated in discussing all the questions presented. By simply encouraging and valuing student questions, we had created what Oldfather (1993) has identified as "honored voice," an aspect of classroom culture that supports intrinsic motivation for literacy. "Honored voice is a condition of deep responsiveness in the classroom environment to students' oral, written, and artistic self-expression. Through honored voice the community of learners invites, listens to, responds to, and acts upon students' thoughts, feelings, interests, and needs" (Oldfather & Dahl, 1994, p. 143).

Second, during whole-class sessions, students exhibited a desire to communicate that which perplexed and interested them by attending to the wording of questions. This led them to listen carefully to each other and offer suggestions for more exact statements of questions. Their sensitivity to the phrasing of questions is significant because, as every researcher knows, "the way in which questions are worded is a crucial consideration in extracting the

type of information desired" (Merriam, 1988, p. 79). Researchers within a field or discipline use questions to organize their investigations. Like researchers, the second graders worked at developing exacting questions that would capture precisely what needed to be considered. For example, Julie was led by her classmates to see that it was more accurate to ask "Why did Harriet Tubman stand in the way of the iron?" than to ask "Why did the lady always stand in the way?" Smith (1992) proposes, in his philosophical exploration of what it means to question, that a field's questions serve as rendezvous points for those who belong to a community of inquirers. Like Smith, we see questions as important rendezvous points for children who want to investigate literature through discussion.

Third, students' questions were compromised because of assumptions about teacher questioning. We began Phase Two by directing the second graders to ask questions with opposing points of view or more than one plausible answer; those were the kinds of questions presented to them in Phase One to elicit critical thinking. We discovered in ourselves the tendency to impose teacher ideas about what constitutes a "good" discussion question on students' question-asking. The students helped us to understand that privileging only certain kinds of questions supported an interpretive culture that "stifles rather than enlarges the multiple and complex understandings essential to the literary experience" (Hynds, 1991, p. 123). The assumptions we brought to student questioning reflected a hierarchical view of questioning. The idea that thinking and questioning can be ordered hierarchically according to Bloom's taxonomy or other conceptual schemes is familiar to most teachers and teacher educators. Process-product research on the effects of cognitive level of question on student response has been mixed (Samson, Strykowski, Weinstein, & Wahlberg, 1987), but most educators continue to think of questions hierarchically.

Fourth, we found it significant that it was not necessary or even reasonable to apply our long-standing teacher beliefs about questioning to students. When the students are asking the questions, the teacher's concern should be ensuring that they can pursue questions genuinely important to them. When students ask questions, they will be prompted to think in whatever ways contribute to the situation at hand. Sometimes that might lead to analytical reasoning, and other times it might simply involve recalling textual information. What is important for us as teachers to consider, with regard to the questions we pose, represents a different set of issues than when students are asking questions. Thus, we caution other educators who value their ability to ask students thought-provoking questions to beware of the tendency to assume that students need to mimic the kind of questions that we, as their teachers, believe are important to ask.

Within and beyond the field of reading, there is support for putting the questions of learners at the center of formal education. For example, in cognitive studies of reading, there has been evidence that self-questioning contributes to processing prose (Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991; Wong, 1985). The focus in this line of investigation has been on the effects of training or teaching students to ask

certain kinds of questions that contribute to constructing understandings approximating an "ideal or expert" reading of text. While this approach to researching the relationship between questioning and reading is paradigmatically different from our research on questioning, they both focus on the potential value of questioning in understanding and interpreting written texts. Support for the kind of student questioning we came to value can readily be found within the whole language philosophical approach to reading. For example, when interviewed about literacy as inquiry, Jerome Harste proposed that schooling be organized so that the questions children ask become the centerpiece of disciplinary learning (see Monson & Monson, 1994). Thus, the idea that the questions of readers are important connects different traditions within the field of literacy education.

Beyond the field of reading, the work of Michel Meyer (1994) is particularly relevant. Meyer, a European philosopher, has introduced problematology as an alternative conception of reason where questioning rather than answering becomes the foundational principle. He has demonstrated that all propositions and assertions are actually responses to questions. This leads him to conclude that "questioning has been the unthematized foundation of philosophy and of thought at large, even though philosophers have preferred to adopt another norm, granting privilege to answers and thereby repressing questions into the realm of the preliminary and the unessential" (Meyer, 1994, p. 1). The emphasis we placed on questioning as a response to reading is philosophically compatible with Meyer's view that "reading, too, is a questioning process [because] it forces the reader to confront himself with what is in question in the text" (quoted in Wolfson, 1990, p. 429). Meyer's theory of problematology provides a rationale for conceiving of reading and critical thinking as inherently being about questioning.

In this study, we used our authority as teachers to direct students to ask questions after listening to a literature selection. Based on our analysis, we have concluded that it is educationally valuable to direct students to respond with questions to reading experiences. The emphasis we have placed on questioning as a response to literature has been criticized by some reader- response purists because it privileges one type of response over others. We understand and appreciate this criticism in light of the growing support and enthusiasm for ways of teaching that allow students to use reading, writing, listening, and speaking to accomplish personally meaningful communicative endeavors. What we experienced with the second graders is consistent with this educational trend, but that does not mean we are advocating that all teachers across all instructional situations seek questions as a response to literature all the time. Nevertheless, there should be more emphasis placed on the questions students want to consider about text in classroom discussions, whether they be reader-centered or teacher-directed. It seems rather obvious that something is wrong when "those who ask questions—teachers, texts, tests—are not seeking knowledge; those who would seek knowledge—students—do not ask questions" (Dillon, 1988, p. 197). Something needs to be done to reverse this situation if we truly be-

lieve that education should promote the kind of thinking that enables citizens to make informed judgments about public issues and to contribute democratically to finding solutions for social problems (Glaser, 1985).

This study does not provide information about the questions students might pose for discussion after independently reading literature. Students listened to literature as opposed to reading it themselves. Opportunities for them to read were limited. During whole-group sessions, they read the questions that we recorded for them on an easel. During peer-group discussions, they read the questions they had prepared, and they used the storybook to reread text and reexamine illustrations. Further research is needed to investigate the questions students would choose to discuss after reading for themselves.

The data on students' questions were collected once a week during a reading/language arts morning block of time. No data were collected during other instructional periods, during which students may have volunteered questions. There was no basis for determining whether the weekly invitations to pose questions about literature could have prompted students to ask questions during other learning experiences or during typical classroom interactions. Thus, the study is limited with regard to issues of transfer. Future studies are needed to investigate whether promoting questioning in one venue leads students to engage in questioning in other areas. Similar studies would contribute to an understanding of the kind of schooling practices needed to convince students that their curiosity and inquisitiveness are valued and essential to learning.

Furthermore, there is no information with regard to the potential benefits of student questions on formal or informal measures of reading achievement. Our focus was on understanding the process of transferring responsibility to students for elements of literature discussions that promote critical thinking. We found the quality of the questions and thinking exhibited by the class of second graders compelling evidence of the educational worth of having students generate literature discussion questions. Nevertheless, we realize that other literacy educators will want to test the efficacy of student questioning with "objective" measures of reading comprehension. That research will emanate from a different epistemological and ontological world view than that which guided our research. Future research based on this study should focus, instead, on understanding what teacher candidates and practicing teachers need to experience to accept that students can and will ask the kinds of questions that help them learn. While we appreciate the controversies over how people learn to read and how reading instruction should be researched (McKenna, Stahl, & Reinking, 1994), we also hope that future research on student questions can serve as a point of rendezvous that eventually yields recommendations with regard to the importance of student questions in learning that can be supported across paradigmatic differences.

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